Caring for Refugee Patients in General Practice
A desk-top guide (4th edition)

Queensland

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This guide has been produced to support GPs in caring for refugee patients. More detailed information can be found in the companion publication, *Promoting Refugee Health: A Guide for Doctors, Nurses and Other Healthcare Practitioners Caring for People from Refugee Backgrounds* available to download from the Victorian Refugee Health Network website: www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au.

A Refugee Health Assessment Template has been developed under the auspices of General Practice Victoria (GPV) to guide GPs in carrying out refugee health assessments. It is available from the General Practice Victoria website: www.gpv.org.au.

While best efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the information presented in this publication, readers are reminded that it is a guide only. It is understood that health practitioners will remain vigilant in their clinical responsibilities and exercise their clinical skill and judgement at all times.

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture cannot be held responsible for error or consequences arising from the use of information contained in this publication, or from information in linked websites, and disclaim all responsibility for any loss or damage which may be suffered or caused by a person relying on the information contained herein. Please note that website referral sites may alter and it is recommended to link to the host site to search for further information.

Please contact the Victorian Refugee Health Network at Foundation House if referral or other information has changed at info@refugeehealthnetwork.org.au.
1. Caring for the refugee patient

Each year many thousands of refugees settle in Australia from regions such as South-East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Africa, where they have endured conflict and persecution. Many people of refugee background have a higher rate of long-term physical and psychological problems than other migrants, due in large part to their exposure to deprivation, conflict and oppression. One in four will have been subject to torture or severe human rights violations, with almost three in four being exposed to traumatic events such as forced dislocation, prolonged political repression, refugee camp experiences and loss of, or separation from, family members in violent circumstances.

The time-based Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Items 701, 703, 705 and 707 can be used for the ‘Health Assessment for Refugees and other Humanitarian Entrants’ (formerly MBS Items 714 and 716). These MBS Items enable GPs to undertake a complete history, examination, investigation, problem list and management plan for new arrivals, many of whom will not have had access to comprehensive health care for some years. For information regarding eligibility for the assessment visit the Department of Health and Ageing Medicare Health Assessment Resource Kit at: www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mha_resource_kit.

Many patients of refugee background:
- will require a professional interpreter (engaged free of charge via the Translating and Interpreting Service National Doctors’ Priority Line on 1300 131 450)
- may not have undergone pre-departure screening or may have medical conditions that were not picked up prior to arrival in Australia
- may have physical and psychological sequelae associated with pre-migration trauma and torture
- may have spent extended periods in detention in Australia
- may be experiencing medical conditions that are uncommon in Australia
- may be struggling with the practical tasks of settling in Australia
- may not know where to get assistance
- may require an approach to consultation and management which accommodates the impact of past trauma, prior experience of health care, cultural differences and the stresses of resettlement.
2. Identifying patients from a refugee background

If your patient speaks a language other than English and comes from a country which has a history of conflict and human rights violations for example Afghanistan, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Iran or Burma, they are likely to be from a refugee background. A country of asylum or transit such as Pakistan, Malaysia, Thailand or Egypt, can also suggest a refugee background. Country of birth is not necessarily an indication of ethnicity or religious background. Clients from refugee backgrounds can also be identified by their visa number which indicates the category of Australia’s Humanitarian program under which they arrived. This includes entrants with the following visas:

**OFFSHORE - REFUGEE**
- 200 Refugee
- 201 In Country Special Humanitarian
- 203 Emergency rescue
- 204 Women at Risk

**OFFSHORE – SPECIAL HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM**
- 202 Global Special Humanitarian

**ONSHORE PROTECTION PROGRAM**
- 866 (permanent) Protection

**ASYLUM SEEKERS** (see Section 11)

Consider marking patient files with their visa number, country of birth, preferred language and date of arrival to aid future identification, particularly in patients with special or complex needs.

### Pre-arrival health screening

Prior to arriving in Australia, refugee clients may have undergone some of the following tests:

- **Visa Medical** – refugee and humanitarian entrants undergo a basic medical examination during the visa application process. This may take place months prior to arrival in Australia. The Visa Medical may include: a chest x-ray, HIV serology, syphilis serology, hepatitis B and C serology and a full medical examination.
- **Departure Health Check (DHC)** – a proportion of applicants undergo this health check approximately 72 hours prior to departure. The DHC usually includes a physical examination, some treatment for parasites and infections, an MMR vaccine and a rapid test for malaria. Personal health information and the DHC results are recorded on a Health Manifest along with health alerts.

*Visa numbers are subject to change. For the most up to date information visit the Department of Immigration and Citizenship webpage [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au).
It is important for clinicians to be aware of the pre-arrival screening process as it has implications for post-arrival health care (i.e. Mantoux tests should not be performed within 1 month of a live virus vaccine such as the MMR; Albendazole may result in a false negative serology for Strongyloides infection).

Newly arrived refugee patients may require assistance following up on health alerts from their pre-arrival health screening. These alerts include:

- Health Undertaking – entrants in whom TB, HIV, hepatitis B or C or other infectious diseases are detected in the course of visa medical screening may be subject to a Health Undertaking which requires individuals to present for follow-up monitoring within four weeks of arrival in Australia. (See Section 5).

- Red and General Health Alerts – provide notification, in the alerts column of the Health Manifest, of any potentially serious concerns picked up during a Departure Health Check medical screen to ensure follow up on arrival. See Red and General Health alert information on the Victorian Refugee Health Network website www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au for more information.

Asylum seekers will have had varied health screening experiences depending on mode of arrival in Australia and migration status (see Section 11).

For country background information visit the following websites:
- Ethnomed http://ethnomed.org
- World Health Organisation www.who.int/countries/en
- United Nations High Commission for Refugees www.unhcr.org.au
3. Engaging a professional interpreter

Many recently arrived refugees do not speak English to a level that is sufficient to explain complex health issues. It is particularly important that a professional interpreter is utilised with refugee patients with low English proficiency. Engaging an interpreter improves both the quality and safety of provision of healthcare. There are ethical issues associated with using family, friends, a bilingual worker or untrained personnel as interpreters. Such issues include:

- no certainty of accuracy of medical information conveyed, nor of instructions, dosages or diagnosis
- untrained interpreters may be exposed to confidential information, or information of a sensitive or traumatic nature
- placing undue stress on family relations
- imposing unfair responsibility on children.

In short, health care professionals have a professional obligation to understand their clients’ needs and clients have the right to fully understand the information provided by health care workers. Using a trained interpreter is the best way to ensure this.

Confidentiality is part of a professional interpreter’s code of ethics, and the engagement of professional interpreters forms part of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Standards for General Practice. Optimal communication reduces anxiety as well as facilitating the consultation.

Booking and using an interpreter

PRIVATE PRACTICE

TIS on-site and telephone interpreting is free for GPs and specialists (and their staff) in private practice when offering Medicare related services. If your practice does not already have a policy or strategy in place for use of interpreters please use the following points as a guide to establishing an effective strategy:

- ensure all staff are aware that TIS National telephone and on-site interpreting services are free of charge for doctors, nurses and front of house staff while engaging clients of refugee background
- enlist the cooperation of administrative staff to implement a system for booking interpreters
- register your practice for a TIS National Client Code
- when a client calls and is having trouble communicating, ask for their name, phone number and preferred language and tell them you will call them back with an interpreter, then call the TIS Doctors’ Priority Line to engage a suitable interpreter and to be put back through to the client using the number they gave
- plan consultations in advance where possible so that an interpreter can be present, and a longer consultation time allowed
- establish if the patient has a preferred language, ethnicity or gender of interpreter
• be aware that a telephone interpreter may be preferred by the client for confidentiality reasons – especially if they are from a small community or language group; it can be helpful to ask if the client prefers an interpreter from interstate
• bookings for on-site interpreters should ideally be made three days in advance (this may be waived if medically indicated)
• on-site interpreters are available for appointments between the hours of 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday and in extraordinary circumstances they can be arranged out of these hours
• TIS Doctors’ Priority Line telephone interpreter service is available 24 hours, 7 days a week, free of charge for private practitioners on 1300 131 450. On average it takes less than 3 minutes to connect with an interpreter via this service. Wait times for minority languages can be slightly longer
• telephone interpreters can also be booked in advance using the Request for Pre-booked Telephone Interpreter form
• all TIS bookings can be made via fax or online
• ideally the consultation room should be equipped with a hands-free speaker telephone or two handsets to allow for working with telephone interpreters
• choose seating arrangements that will enable direct communication with the patient
• each state/territory will have private interpreter services, available in addition to the TIS National services (see Section 12).


COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES AND HOSPITALS
In a community health centre or hospital, check existing booking procedures and interpreter access as arrangements vary from service to service.

PRACTICE TIP

The Doctors’ Priority Line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 1300 131 450. This number will take you to the front of the TIS National queue. The non-priority access phone number for TIS National is simply 131 450. TIS is also available free of charge for pharmacists, but at the time of writing TIS services are not available free of charge for allied health staff.

LINKS TO TIS FORMS AND RESOURCES
4. Consultation and management

Medical consultation may be a source of anxiety for refugee patients, especially those experiencing psychological sequelae of torture and trauma (see Section 9). Symptoms such as memory loss, confusion, poor concentration and self blame may affect the patient’s capacity to hear and understand instructions and to provide information to the doctor. Intrusive memories may be triggered in the course of the consultation. Refugees may have a distrust of authority figures, among them medical professionals. For some this fear may be based on doctors having been actively involved in perpetrating or supervising torture in their country of origin. Others may have uncertainties about their immigration status, mistakenly fearing deportation if they are found to have a serious health problem. Communication difficulties may be further complicated by cultural and religious differences and the patient’s lack of familiarity with the Australian health care system.

In consultation

- Allow time to establish rapport and trust.
- Explain and emphasise doctor-patient confidentiality, patient consent, choice and control.
- Explain procedures and be prepared to repeat information.
- Provide opportunities for the patient to ask questions or seek clarification as some will have come from other cultures in which this was not encouraged.
- Explain why you are asking certain questions.

- Understand that patients may openly show fear and hostility which are characteristic responses to trauma and may have little to do with the consultation per se.
- Be aware that the surgery and aspects of the consultation may be reminders of past trauma (e.g. being made to wait, sudden movements, seating arrangements, medical instruments).
- Consider suspending and rescheduling procedures, if the patient becomes overly anxious.
- Consider a team approach, working closely with reception staff, practice nurse, other doctors and practice or health centre management.

Ongoing management

- Assessment and management can take place over several sessions if a gradual approach is indicated.
- When deciding whether or not to proceed or defer certain questions or an invasive procedure, consider the importance of establishing rapport and trust with the patient, and of ensuring that they fully understand any procedure and the reasons for performing it.
- Consider gender issues, for example, male GPs may consider referring female patients to a female doctor; a male patient may prefer a male doctor.
- Consider a patient-held record, particularly for immunisations, as refugee patients are likely to move frequently in the early settlement period.
- Establish if there are any cultural or religious factors that need to be accommodated.
Prescribing

- Many refugee patients come from areas where pharmaceuticals are poorly regulated and they may be unaware of the consequences of inappropriate dosing.
- Compliance may also be affected by language problems. An interpreter can write instructions in the patient’s own language or instructions may be conveyed diagrammatically.
- A PBS listed drug is highly preferable owing to financial difficulties, as is generic prescribing.
- Take into account a patient’s cultural or religious practices (e.g. halal medications for patients of Muslim faiths).
- As ethnicity may affect the efficacy and side-effects of medication, commence patient on a lower dose of medication and increase it slowly, dependent on clinical need.

Explaining the culture and the structure of the health care system; the role of the GP; and the patient’s health care entitlements and rights.

Allow some flexibility with appointments as patients may be unfamiliar with appointment systems or be experiencing anxiety, sleep or memory problems, which may affect compliance.

Consider an appointment reminder call, particularly in the early settlement period.

Referral for investigations and specialist management

Be aware in assessing the need for investigations and specialist referral that these can involve a great deal of organisational effort on the part of the refugee patient and may require additional practical support.

With the patient’s permission, include information about the need for an interpreter in referral to specialists, as well as information about any other special needs.

Given language difficulties and lack of familiarity with specialist referral procedures, consider making the first appointment for the patient.

Consider requesting that patients be charged the Medicare Benefits Schedule fee only for specialist services, or alternatively refer to a public hospital.

Consider other Medicare item numbers when billing refugee patients, e.g. case conferencing, mental health, practice nurse and enhanced primary care.

In rural and regional areas consider the potential for use of telemedicine to access specialist consultation and interpreting services.
5. Medical history, examination and immunisation

A comprehensive health assessment, particularly for new arrivals is recommended because:

- people of refugee background often have relatively poor health status and are likely to have had limited access to health care
- pre-arrival screening is limited and follow-up treatment focuses on serious communicable disease
- not all patients are screened and a disease may be contracted subsequent to, or missed in, the screening process
- some health problems experienced by people from refugee backgrounds are asymptomatic, but nonetheless may have serious long-term health consequences (e.g. intestinal parasitic infection, vitamin D deficiency, hepatitis B)
- it optimises the opportunity for early intervention, helping to ensure that physical and psychological problems do not become enduring barriers to settlement
- sensitively administered, a thorough medical examination can reassure the patient and contribute to their psychological recovery.

Immunisation

Vaccine preventable diseases are endemic or epidemic in many countries of origin of refugee families. As many refugee patients may have incomplete immunisation or unsatisfactory records of vaccination, their vaccination status should be reviewed, immunisation offered and consent gained according to the recommendations of the Australian Immunisation Handbook [www.immunise.health.gov.au](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au). Also see the Quick Guide Catch-Up Immunisation [http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/Quick-guide-on-catch-up-immunisation-for-Victoria](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/Quick-guide-on-catch-up-immunisation-for-Victoria) for an easy to use immunisation schedule.

The Health Undertaking

Entrants in whom certain infectious diseases are detected in the course of pre-arrival screening may be subject to a Health Undertaking. The Undertaking means that the individual is approved for entry to Australia on the condition that they present for follow-up monitoring. It is the responsibility of the applicant to contact the Health Undertaking service by ringing the number listed on the Health Undertaking form (1800 811 334 at the time of writing) issued prior to migration. However some applicants may be uncertain about their obligations or how to fulfil them. Contact your state or territory public health facility or TB service (see Section 12) if you require more information. A copy of the Health Undertaking form is available here online [www.immi.gov.au/allforms/pdf/815.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/pdf/815.pdf).

Free translation of medical documents

If a patient has a medical report or vaccination certificate issued prior to migration, the Translating and Interpreting Service will provide translation into English in the form of an extract or summary. This service is free of charge to Australian citizens or permanent residents within two years of their arrival or grant of permanent residence. For information on eligible persons and documents see:

### 6. Diagnoses to consider: a syndromic approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant symptoms</th>
<th>Important diagnoses to consider in refugee clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fever</td>
<td>Malaria, influenza, tuberculosis – pulmonary or extra-pulmonary, filariasis, HIV, salmonella typhi, rickettsial disease, dengue, hepatitis, dental infections, rheumatic fever, PID, pyogenic abscess, osteomyelitis and other bacterial infections, yellow fever/haemorrhagic fever (if &lt;2/52) in Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaundice</td>
<td>Hepatitis A/B/C/E/other, malaria, typhoid sepsis, leptospirosis, liver abscess or other liver or gall bladder disease, haemolysis, drug induced (e.g. isoniazid, alcohol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiredness/weakness</td>
<td>Anaemia, iron deficiency, pregnancy, depression/anxiety/PTSD, thyroid disease, diabetes, HIV, TB, vitamin D deficiency, lead poisoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appetite loss</td>
<td>Intestinal parasites, constipation, depression/anxiety/PTSD, H. Pylori, chronic disease, malignancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight loss</td>
<td>TB, HIV, malignancy, thyroid disease, diabetes, infective endocarditis or other chronic infection, food insecurity, depression/anxiety/PTSD, bereavement, eating disorders, dental problems, intestinal parasites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdominal pain</td>
<td>Peptic ulcer/gastritis/H. Pylori infection, constipation, parasitic infestations, PID, malignancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhoea</td>
<td>Asthma, amoebiasis, bacterial infection such as salmonella, shigella, cholera, campylobacter, intestinal parasites, HIV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing difficulties</td>
<td>Asthma, COPD, tuberculosis, pneumonia. Other lung disease such as pulmonary eosinophilia, obesity, rheumatic and other heart disease, anxiety, anaemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cough</td>
<td>Acute respiratory tract infection, tuberculosis, asthma, COPD, rheumatic heart disease, bronchiectasis, reflux, medications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscular/joint/chronic pain</td>
<td>Vitamin D deficiency, injuries, muscle strain, osteoarthritis and other types of arthritis, infectious diseases (e.g. rheumatic fever, TB, osteomyelitis, sickle cell crisis, psychosomatic illness, congenital abnormalities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>Meningitis, tension headache, hypertension, depression/anxiety/PTSD, refractory errors of the eye and other eye disorders, cervical spine dysfunction, thyroid disease, sinusitis, previous head injury, migraine, infections, raised intracranial pressure, anaemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysuria/haematuria</td>
<td>UTI, schistosomiasis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia. herpes, tuberculosis, prostatitis, bladder carcinoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fits, fainting, funny turns</td>
<td>Anaemia, epilepsy, postural hypotension (due to inadequate fluid intake, alcohol and other substance use), diabetes, pregnancy, culture bound syndromes, panic attacks, anxiety/depression/PTSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraesthesia</td>
<td>Diabetes, nutritional deficiency, leprosy, syphilis, B12 deficiency; other causes of peripheral neuropathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altered mental state</td>
<td>Acute sepsis, cerebral malaria, meningitis, encephalitis, CNS disease, diabetes, B12 deficiency; lead poisoning, drugs, psychosis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# 7. Physical examination of refugee patients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examination</th>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Diagnosis to consider in refugee clients and notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height/weight, percentiles/BMI</td>
<td>Low BMI/percentile</td>
<td>Malnutrition/ chronic infection (e.g. parasites, tuberculosis, depression, obesity/Western-style diet). See p.11. Repeated measurements useful especially in children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High BMI/percentile</td>
<td>Obesity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>Hypertension</td>
<td>May be chronic and undiagnosed, or secondary to anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hypotension</td>
<td>Poor fluid intake/excessive coffee intake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>Fever</td>
<td>Correlate with length of time since arrival, recent country resided in and other symptoms and signs (e.g. cough, rash).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peripheries/skin</td>
<td>Scarring</td>
<td>Torture, trauma, burns, keloid, BCG scar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rash</td>
<td>Fungal infections, scabies, cutaneous larva migrans, other creeping eruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Itch</td>
<td>Dry skin, eczema, scabies, onchocerciasis, psychogenic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Altered pigmentation</td>
<td>With anhidrosis/anaesthesia: leprosy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hair loss</td>
<td>Fungal infections, psoriasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nail changes</td>
<td>Onychomycosis, koilonychia (prolonged Fe deficiency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spider naevi</td>
<td>Liver disease, B12 deficiency, pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ulcers</td>
<td>Cutaneous leishmaniasis, bacterial, tropical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oedema</td>
<td>Lymphoedema – filariasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>Jaundice, anaemia. Pterigia, Cataracts</td>
<td>See p.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xerophthalmia. Squint. Refractive error</td>
<td>Vitamin A deficiency dryness and ulceration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lid scarring</td>
<td>Trachoma scarring, nodules (like sugar crystals under upper lid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ears</td>
<td>Discharge. Perforation</td>
<td>Chronic suppurative otitis media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deafness</td>
<td>Chronic infection, traumatic (head injury/explosions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental</td>
<td>Dental caries, Missing teeth, Gum disease</td>
<td>Torture trauma, cultural practices, Gingivitis/ vitamin C deficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Examination for Refugee Patients in General Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examination</th>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Diagnosis to consider in refugee clients and notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neck</td>
<td>Goitre</td>
<td>Iodine deficiency/hypo/hyperthyroidism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lymphadenopathy</td>
<td>See below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lungs</td>
<td>Localised crepitations</td>
<td>Bronchitis/bronchiectasis, pneumonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generalised crepitations</td>
<td>Congestive cardiac failure (may be secondary to rheumatic/ischaemic heart disease, anaemia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cavitations/pleural effusions</td>
<td>Tuberculosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wheezing</td>
<td>Pulmonary eosinophilia, asthma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Heart murmurs</td>
<td>Rheumatic heart disease, undiagnosed congenital heart disease, flow murmur from anaemia, tuberculosis, hypertensive cardiomegaly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pericarditis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdominal</td>
<td>Hepatomegaly and/or tenderness</td>
<td>Hepatitis (viral, alcohol, other), schistosomiasis, thalassaemia, amoebic or pyogenic liver abscess, hydatid, hepatic carcinoma, subphrenic abscess, visceral leishmaniasis, chronic liver disease, malaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Splenomegaly</td>
<td>Typhoid, malaria (with hepatomegaly), visceral leishmaniasis, thalassaemia, bacterial endocarditis, liver disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lymph nodes</td>
<td>Generalised lymphadenopathy</td>
<td>Tuberculosis, HIV, toxoplasmosis, lymphoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Localised lymphadenopathy</td>
<td>Tuberculosis, lymphogranulosum venereum, Lymphoma or other malignancy, toxoplasmosis, chancroid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If symptomatic or at a later date review the following systems:

- **Skeletal/muscular**
  - Bone deformity. Joint disease. Chronic bone pain and tenderness
  - Old fractures – may be malunited, or other trauma, vitamin D deficiency
  - Osteoarthritis, tuberculosis, inflammatory arthropathy, tuberculous osteomyelitis

- **Male genitalia**
  - Urethritis, filariasis, epididymitis

- **Female genitalia**
  - Pelvic tenderness: Vulval scarring, fistulae
  - Chronic PID, previous endometritis, female genital mutilation

- **CNS and PNS**
  - Hyper-reflexia:
  - Thyroid disease, anxiety
  - Decreased sensation
  - Diabetes, with thickened peripheral nerves-leprosy, B12 deficiency
  - Weakness
  - Malignancy or other space occupying lesion, lead poisoning

- **Urinalysis**
  - Red cells, white cells
  - Infection (e.g. UTI, STI, schistosomiasis), undiagnosed renal disease
  - Protein
  - Renal disease, diabetes
  - Glucose
  - Diabetes
8. Undertaking investigations

Investigations will depend on the client’s symptoms, country of origin and transit.

It is important to provide a clear explanation of the reasons for investigation and to provide pre-test counselling for HIV and others STIs. Respect client confidentiality, including for adolescents. It is not necessary to get a detailed sexual history or a history of sexual trauma to offer screening.

Routine tests recommended by Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases (ASID) are:
- Hepatitis B serology: request Hep B sAb, sAg, cAb
- Hepatitis C Ab
- HIV
- Mantoux appropriate as a first line test in children and people of all ages (or interferon gamma assay — Medicare rebate only if immunocompromised; can be used as screen in adults and adolescents; should not be used as initial screening in children <5; use in older children is contentious.)
- Schistosomiasis serology
- Strongyloides serology
- Syphilis RPR/TPPA
- Malaria rapid antigen detection test and thick and thin film

Other important tests in refugees from resource poor settings include:
- FBE
- Ferritin
- LFTs
- Vitamin D level (if dark skinned or little exposure to sunlight due to dress or other risk factor)
- Vitamin A level if < 15 years (WHO advocates empirical treatment for risk groups)
- Stool MC+S OCP especially if paediatric or abdominal symptoms
- Helicobacter stool antigen for H. Pylori if abdominal symptoms
- Serum active B12 and red blood cell folate (in people arriving from situations with significantly restricted food access).

STI screen including:
- First pass urine PCR for chlamydia and gonorrhoea, (or urethral or cervical swabs)
- Blood testing as above for Hep B,C, HIV, Syphilis
- Other chronic disease and cancer screening according to age e.g. Pap smear, mammography, lipids, glucose, etc.
## Investigation results

### An approach to common investigation results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test/result</th>
<th>Differential diagnosis</th>
<th>Initial management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FBE/microcytic anaemia</td>
<td>Iron-deficiency anaemia, thalassaemia.</td>
<td>Treat iron-deficiency anaemia and recheck FBE, Fe studies +/- haemoglobin electrophoresis, after 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe studies/abnormal</td>
<td>Fe deficiency, low ferritin, low serum iron, increased TIBC</td>
<td>Investigate and treat cause of anaemia, rule out hookworm infection. If dietary cause, educate about iron-rich diet, 3 months of iron treatment, then repeat bloods, if not resolving, investigate further.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBE/eosinophilia</td>
<td>Worms, e.g. strongyloides, hookworm, schistosoma, filariasis, hydatid disease, cysticercosis, cutaneous larva migrans, tropical pulmonary eosinophilia</td>
<td>Further investigations for type of parasite, if not resolving after treatment refer to infectious diseases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faecal specimens/OCP</td>
<td>Pathogenic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entamoeba histolytica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ascaris lumbricoides</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giardia intestinalis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hookworm (Ancylostoma or Necator)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taenia spp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whamworm (Trichuris spp)</td>
<td>Antibiotic Guidelines for treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-pathogenic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entamoeba coli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entamoeba hartmanii</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entamoeba gingivalis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Endolimax nana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iodamoeba butschlii</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blastocystis hominis (may be symptomatic)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dientamoeba fragilis (may be symptomatic)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin D level &lt;50</td>
<td>&lt;12.5 severe insufficiency</td>
<td>Treat with daily 1,000-2,000 IU D3 or high-dose vitamin D if available. Retest after 3 months, then 12 monthly screen family members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.5–25 Vit D moderate deficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25–50 Vit D insufficient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### An approach to common investigation results (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test/result</th>
<th>Differential diagnosis</th>
<th>Initial management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HBV sAg +ve</td>
<td>Current infection (acute/chronic)</td>
<td>If s Ag +ve or sAb –ve and cAb +ve needs LFTs, full Hep A/B/C serology, HBV viral load, alpha-fetoprotein, INR, ultrasound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBV cAb +ve</td>
<td>Current or past infection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBV sAb +ve</td>
<td>Immune (vaccinated or resolved infection)</td>
<td>If abN LFTs, or Hep B e Ag +ve refer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hep C Ab +ve</td>
<td>Hepatitis C past or present infection</td>
<td>Screen family members and vaccinate if non-immune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schistosoma Abs</td>
<td>Past or present infection</td>
<td>Check Hep C viral RNA, LFTs, If either abnormal refer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mantoux test</td>
<td>See Mantoux interpretation guide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma interferon.</td>
<td>Likely to be past infection</td>
<td>If &lt;35 refer infectious diseases for treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. quantiferon gold</td>
<td></td>
<td>If &gt;35 physical exam and CXR, refer or review CXR and physical yearly for signs of TB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis results TPHA, RPR</td>
<td></td>
<td>Screen family members if +ve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongyloides Ab</td>
<td>Past or present infection</td>
<td>See Antibiotic Guidelines for treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaria ICT +ve or thick and thin film +ve</td>
<td>Treat for malaria</td>
<td>Check eosinophil count and stool specimen. See ASID guidelines for treatment. Follow up at 6 months and 12 months with serology and eosinophil count.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urease breath test/stool antigen for H. Pylori</td>
<td></td>
<td>Review urgently if P. falciparum, febrile or acutely unwell Refer ID for advice and see Antibiotic or ASID guidelines for treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>See Antibiotic Guidelines for H. pylori treatment Retest after 4 weeks if persistent symptoms to check eradication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Psychological sequelae

It is rare for a patient to disclose a history of psychological trauma. Talking about past experiences can be psychologically beneficial. The knowledge that the patient has endured certain experiences due to their country of origin or transit is generally sufficient for you to orient your care. However psychological and psychosomatic symptoms may persist and acknowledgement of their causes may be required for ongoing management. Consider asking about past trauma only if appropriate and there is adequate time for response. Some useful questions are:

• Some people have had bad things happen to themselves and their families. Has anything happened to you or your family that could be affecting your health or the way you are feeling now?
• Do you have any problem I can help you with today that is a result of something that happened in the past?

Responding to a disclosure of torture or trauma

• Validate the patient’s reaction by acknowledging their experience and its associated pain (e.g. ‘That’s a terrible thing you have been through’).
• Remind patients that their reaction is a characteristic response to their circumstances. Often survivors blame themselves and see their reactions as abnormal or weak.
• Avoid false assurances. Nevertheless, indicate that with time and appropriate support, improvement can be achieved.

• Expect that the person who has disclosed a painful event may be unwilling to talk about it in subsequent consultations. Rather than pushing them to do so, talk about other things that may be currently troubling them.
• Expect inconsistencies in the person’s retelling of their trauma history.
• In closing the interview, explain to the person how you are able to assist them.

Management

Medication may be required to manage symptoms which are sufficiently severe that they interfere with the patient’s functioning. However there is a consensus among practitioners experienced in caring for this patient group that optimum treatment involves non-pharmacological approaches either in addition to medication or as the primary treatment modality.

When a patient presents with persistent symptoms believed to be related to trauma, consideration should be given for referral to a psychiatrist, psychologist or the specialist service for survivors of trauma and torture in your state or territory. These free and confidential services are non-denominational, politically neutral and non-aligned.
It is important to do the following:

- provide feedback to the patient on your diagnosis or opinion of their condition
- explain what are understood to be the likely causes of the condition (both psychological and physiological)
- outline treatment options so that the patient is able to make a choice
- arrange urgent psychiatric management in the usual way for patients with symptoms and behaviours such as violence to others or self-harm.

**Somatic complaints**

It is not uncommon for refugee patients to somatise their psychological stress. Consider the following approaches:

- take complaints seriously and conduct appropriate examinations as this can serve to reassure patients when nothing is physically wrong, this is particularly relevant for patient’s reporting rapid heartbeat
- help the patient to make connections between the body and mind; explaining the body’s physiological response to extreme danger can be helpful in making this link
- avoid dismissing somatic complaints or giving reassurances that they will ‘go away with time’
- if somatic symptoms persist consider a referral for counselling and support; this may involve establishing the patient’s trauma history if they have not already disclosed this to you
- specialist services for survivors of trauma and torture are located in each state and territory. See Section 12.

**Common psychological sequelae of trauma and torture**

- Grief
- Guilt and shame
- Distrust and anger
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, commonly: intrusive and recurrent memories, flashbacks, nightmares, avoidance of reminders of traumatic events, detachment from others, numbing, hypervigilance, proneness to startle.

**Important psychological symptoms to screen for:**

**SOMATIC**

- appetite
- energy levels
- daily activities
- aches and pains

**PSYCHOLOGICAL**

- memory
- concentration
- mood/affect
- ‘big worries’ (may elicit ruminations, intrusive memories; settlement stressors, concern for family overseas, psychosis)
- plans and hopes for the future.
10. Settlement support

For refugee patients the normal stresses involved in settling into a new country are often compounded by the stressful, forced and unplanned nature of their departure and the fact that many are in poor health on arrival. Accordingly, they may require the assistance of a community support agency.

If your patient has been in Australia for less than 6 months and has entered through the Australian Government’s Humanitarian Program, or arrived as an asylum seeker and has been granted a permanent protection visa in the last 6 months, they will usually be supported by the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program which supports new arrivals through a coordinated case management approach for the first 6 months after arrival (sometimes for longer periods when the client has complex needs). See Section 12.

If your patient has been in Australia for longer than six months or is ineligible for HSS support, consider a referral to a Settlement Grants Program (SGP) provider such as a Migrant Resource Centre, or to a Community Health Centre (see Section 12). They can also advise on local ethno-specific services. Consider streamlining the referral process by developing a list of local support agencies including phone numbers and addresses.

Consider a referral if your patient is experiencing difficulties in accessing:

- English language classes
- housing
- income support
- employment
- social support
- advice on legal or migration matters
- adequate household and personal effects
- support for complex medical follow-up
- schooling for their children
- child care and parenting support.
11. Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers are people who arrive in Australia and subsequently apply for protection as refugees. Those arriving with valid entry documentation (e.g. a student or visitor visa) are permitted to reside in the community while their application is considered and are often provided with a Bridging Visa for this purpose (e.g. Bridging Visa A, Bridging Visa E).

People arriving in Australia without valid entry documentation are subject to a period of mandatory immigration detention. For those arriving by boat it is usually on Christmas Island in the first instance, while initial health, document and security checks are undertaken. After a period in detention on Christmas Island, and while their claim for permanent protection is being processed, people may be:

- moved into another detention facility on the mainland
- moved into the Community Detention program with support from Red Cross and other community agencies
- released from detention on a Bridging Visa E (with work rights and access to Medicare) with initial support provided by Red Cross under the Community Assistance Scheme (CAS) and then based on assessed need provided with support under CAS or Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS)
- all of the above, over a period of time.

Important considerations for the health care of asylum seekers

- International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) are subcontracted by DIAC to provide health care to asylum seekers in detention (including Community Detention).
- Asylum Seekers are not eligible for Centrelink support. Some asylum seekers living in the community are ineligible for Medicare. Asylum seekers may be eligible for assistance with health care and income support through the Red Cross facilitated Community Assistance Scheme (CAS) or the Asylum Seekers Assistance Scheme (ASAS) (see Section 12). Those who are Medicare ineligible and not eligible for CAS or ASAS rely on specialist asylum seeker health services and other, often pro bono, services.
- Public hospitals have a duty of care at common law which curtails the refusal to provide emergency care regardless of a patient’s capacity to pay. Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory provide free full hospital care and Victoria provides free ambulance, community health, dental services and other services for asylum seekers (see Section 12).
- Steps to contain the cost of care will be important as asylum seekers may face restrictions on their rights to employment, income support and other benefits.
- Asylum seekers may not have undergone the Visa Medical examination offshore, but will do so in Australia as part of their application for a permanent protection visa.
Other visa categories

It should be noted that in some circumstances people from a refugee background have a permanent or temporary visa (e.g. orphan, spouse) that does not entitle them to MBS, yet are unable to pay for healthcare services. These circumstances may require further advice and advocacy with local health and welfare agencies, refugee health services or Centrelink Multicultural Liaison Officers.
12. Referral and further information

**ASYLUM SEEKERS**
Australian Red Cross Asylum Seekers Assistance Scheme (ASAS) and Community Assistance Support (CAS) 07 3367 7222
Services available Cairns, Gold Coast, Rockhampton, Townsville 1300 554 419
Refugee Claimants Support Centre 07 3357 9013
Romero Community Centre 07 3013 0100

**CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES**
Department of Communities (Child Safety Services) 1800 811 810
Child Safety After Hours Service Centre 07 3235 9999
Western Districts Out of Home Care 07 3278 8007

**COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES**
Queensland Health 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) to locate a service

**DENTAL SERVICES**
South Brisbane Dental Hospital 07 3240 1444
Metro North Royal Brisbane Call Centre 1300 650 002
Logan Central Dental Clinic 07 3290 8933
Gold Coast Oral Health (emergency dental care) 07 5526 3572
or 1300 300 850

Toowoomba Dental Clinic 07 4616 6436
Cairns Dental Clinic 07 4050 8711
Townsville Call Centre 1300 300 850

**DISABILITY SERVICES**
Amparo Advocacy Inc 07 3369 2500

**FAMILY PLANNING**
Family Planning Queensland 07 3250 0240
Cairns 07 4051 3788
Rockhampton 07 4927 3999
Toowoomba 07 4632 8166
Townsville 07 4273 8184

**FAMILY VIOLENCE**
Women’s DV Connect Line (24 hours) 1800 811 811
Men’s DV Connect Line (24 hours) 1800 600 636
Immigrant Women’s Support Service (IWSS) 07 3846 3490
Spiritus Counselling and Education Services 1300 114 397

**FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION**
Family Planning Queensland FGM Education Project 07 3250 0240
fax 3250 0292

**HEARING SERVICES**
Audiology Society of Australia 03 9416 4606

Office of Hearing Services (Department of Health and Ageing) for access to Hearing Services Vouchers 02 6289 1555
or 1800 020 103
Australian Hearing 13 17 97

**IMMUNISATION**

Brisbane Southside Public Health Unit 07 3000 9148
Brisbane Northside Public Health Unit 07 3624 1111
Queensland Health Immunisation Program (QHIP) 07 3328 9888
Brisbane City Council Clinics 07 3403 8888

**INFECTION DISEASES**
Queensland Tuberculosis Control Centre, Princess Alexander Hospital 07 3896 3955
or 3896 3963
Prince Charles Hospital 07 3139 4000
Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital Infectious Disease Unit 07 3636 8111
Biala Community Health Centre 07 3837 5633
Cairns TB Health Service 07 4050 6266
Population Health Communicable Disease Unit 07 3234 1155
Caring for refugee patients in general practice

12. Referral and further information

See also local public health units:
Brisbane Northside 07 3624 2243
Brisbane Southside 07 3000 9148
Darling Downs (Toowoomba) 07 4631 9888
Gold Coast 07 5668 3700
Logan 07 3412 2989
West Moreton (Ipswich) 07 3413 1200
Cairns 07 4226 5555
Rockhampton 07 4920 6989
Townsville 07 4753 9000

INTERPRETERS/LANGUAGE SERVICES
TIS Doctors’ Priority Line 1300 131 450
(normal wait time 3 mins)

Fee for service
ONCALL Interpreters and Translators Agency 07 3018 0333
QITS (Queensland Interpreting and Translating Service) 07 3835 3777

LEGAL SERVICES (FREE LEGAL ADVICE)
Refugee and Immigrant Legal Service (RAILS) 07 3846 3189
Women’s Legal Service 07 3392 0670
Outside Brisbane 1800 677 278
Caxton Legal Centre 07 3214 6333
Legal Aid 1300 651 188
Cairns Community Legal Centre 07 4031 7688
Townsville Community Legal Service 07 4721 5511

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH
To locate centres see Community Child Health Services www.health.qld.gov.au/cchs
or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
Community Child Health 1300 366 039
Refugee Maternity Service: Mater Mothers’ Hospital Midwife 0434 189 102
Social Worker 07 3163 8031
Antenatal Clinic 07 3163 8330

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
For a full list of state wide public mental health services across all health districts: www.health.qld.gov.au/mentalhealth/docs/mhservices_directory.pdf
Princess Alexander Mental Health Triage Service 1300 858 998
Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre (QTMHC) 07 3167 8333
Outside Brisbane metro areas 1800 188 189
State Wide Multicultural Mental Health Program coordinator contact Greg Turner 07 3167 8333
Mater Child and Youth Mental Health Services (CYMHS) 07 3840 1640

NUTRITION
Refer to nutritionist at nearest hospital.
Eight Mile Plains Community Health Nutrition Unit, Promotion and Training 07 3169 9800

OLDER REFUGEES
Diversicare 07 3846 1099
Cairns 07 4054 5653
Townsville 07 4723 1470
SPIRITUS Toowoomba 07 3421 2800 or 1300 785 853

OPTOMETRY
Refugee clients are entitled to access the Spectacle Supply Scheme administered by the Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS) for the first 6 months after arrival. They are exempt from the waiting period. For a list of participating optometrists see: www.health.qld.gov.au/mass/spectacles.asp

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING/TORTURE AND TRAUMA
Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) 07 3391 6677
QPASTT services Brisbane, Cairns, Rockhampton, Toowoomba and Townsville. Referral form available online. www.qpastt.org.au
Multicultural Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing: Harmony Place 07 3848 1600
Mercy Family Services
Brisbane 07 3267 9000
Toowoomba 07 4617 7600
Immigrant Women’s Support Service (IWSS) www.iwss.org.au
Sexual Assault Program 07 3846 5400
Centacare Cairns 07 4041 7699
Townsville Multicultural Support Group 07 4775 1588
Lifeline (24 hours) telephone counselling 13 11 14
CARING FOR REFUGEE PATIENTS IN GENERAL PRACTICE

REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT HEALTH SERVICES
Refugee Health Queensland (RHQ)
www.refugeehealth.qld.org.au

Initial refugee health assessment services
Brisbane South Clinic (incorporates the former QIRCH clinic) 07 3163 2880
Cairns Clinic 07 4226 4333
Logan Clinic 07 3290 8900
Toowoomba Clinic 07 4616 6446
Townsville Clinic 07 3163 2880
Zillmere Clinic 1300 366 039

COMPLEX CASE SERVICES
Brisbane South Clinic
www.refugeehealth.qld.org.au

SETTLEMENT SERVICES
HSS Services
(Brisbane) Multicultural Development Association (MDA) 07 3337 5400
(Logan) A.C.C.E.S. Services Inc. 07 3412 8222
(Logan) Multilink Community Services 07 3808 4463
(Toowoomba) Multicultural Development Association 07 4639 3983
(Cairns) Migrant Settlement Services, Centacare Cairns 07 4041 7699
(Townsville) Multicultural Support Group 07 4775 1588

For a full list of organisations funded to provide settlement support from 6 months to 5 years see: www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/settlement-grants/2011-12-grants-recipients.htm

SEXUAL ASSAULT
Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline 1800 010 120
Immigrant Women’s Support Service (IWSS) 07 3846 5400
Crisis Care (24 hours) 1800 010 120

SEXUAL HEALTH
Brisbane Sexual Health Clinic 07 3837 5611
Princess Alexandra Sexual Health Clinic 07 3240 5881
Cairns Sexual Health Clinic 07 4050 6205
Rockhampton Sexual Health and HIV Service 07 4920 5555
Toowoomba – Kobi House, Dept. of Public Medicine 07 4616 6446
Townsville – Sexual Health Unit 07 4778 9600

For a full listing of Queensland Health sexual health services and community based organisations see: www.health.qld.gov.au/sexhealth/help/default.asp#other

OTHER KEY SERVICES
BARC – Brisbane Actionweb for Refugee Collaboration
www.barc.org.au/
Includes resource directory for refugee services in Brisbane
Islamic Women’s Association 07 3208 6333
St Vincent de Paul Society 07 3010 1000
Centre for Multicultural Pastoral Care 07 3109 6810
Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support Centre 07 4613 0895
Inala Community House 07 3372 1711
Kyabra Community Association Inc. (Sunnybank) 07 3373 9499
Multilink Community Services (Logan) 07 3808 4463